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By E.C. Burke

Date Jan. 28, 1947

PRISONERS OF WAR IN TUNISIA AND SICILY: A STUDY IN GERMAN MORALE AND PW OPERATIONS

Description

This report deals with an analysis of material, derived from interrogation of prisoners of war, after the Tunisian and Sicilian campaigns and attempts to evaluate the results with reference to the general state of German military and civilian morale.

11 November 1943

SUMMARY

This report, based on material released by the North African Censorship Authorities, is concerned with a comparison of the attitudes displayed by German prisoners of war after the Tunisian and Sicilian campaigns as indices of Nazi military and civilian morale.

The paper shows, first, that German military morale in Sicily had suffered considerable deterioration in comparison with the morale of German soldiers in Tunisia as illustrated by the soldiers' reactions to selected topics like war prospects, attitudes toward enemy, home, etc.

In order to use these results for an evaluation of the present state of German military and civilian morale the following qaulifications are suggested: (a) a prisoner of war interrogation reveals that the morale of soldiers in a defeat situation must be distinguished from the morale prevailing in a pre-battle situation; as to the civilian population only a limited sector has so far been exposed directly to a situation of battle and defeat which can be compared to the experiences of the soldiers.

There is considerable evidence, however, for the assumption that the air war over Germany has indirectly induced defeatism over wide areas in people not directly exposed to air raids. Although it is impossible to estimate the extent of this process and although state and Party controls seem to remain essentially intact, it is probably safe to assume that PW appeals previously successful with German soldiers after the Tunisian and Sicilian campaigns may also be applied to a large part of the German civilian population not yet directly affected by the war. Special examples are, therefore, included.

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PRISONERS OF WAR IN TUNISIA AND SICILY: A STUDY IN GERMAN MORALE AND PW OPERATIONS

This study is based upon material prepared by the North African Censorship Authorities, and is derived from an analysis of interrogations, letters, and diaries of 110 Pa/W (prisoners of war) in Sicily. Results of this analysis reveal certain significant differences in morale between German Ps/W from Tunisia and those from Sicily; these differences are relevant not only to a general evaluation of Nazi military and civilian morale, but also to PW operations against Germany. The results (which generally confirm conclusions reported in previous studies 1/) are valuable because they deal with a comparatively large sample of Ps/W. 2/ Unfortunately, no distinctions were given with regard to the military rank, social class, and regional background of the prisoners; hence inferences on these points could not be made.

I.

A comparison of the morale of German soldiers during the Tunisian campaign and the Sicilian campaign reveals significant differences of attitude for certain selected categories. These differences may be briefly summarized as follows:

1. Cooperation: A high percentage of Ps/W from Tunisia (probably the majority) resisted interrogation on military details. Only 6 out of the 110 prisoners in Sicily showed a similar reluctance, and that in most cases rather half-hearted. Similarly, most anti-Nazi and defeatist prisoners in Tunisia were afraid of possible retaliation and denunciation by the Nazis in their PW camps. This fear was greatly reduced among those in Sicily. In one camp they gathered around the interrogation officer and shouted: "We want to go home!" "Finish the war!""There is no use going on!"

2. War Prospects: Faith in ultimate victory (or, at least, a western compromise peace after beating back the Russians) is said to have been characteristic of more than half the prisoners from Tunis. On the other hand, more than half the 110 Ps/W in Sicily spontaneously admitted that the war was lost. These wanted peace at any price, insisted that the German soldiers wished nothing else but to be allowed to return home to their families, their work, their glass of beer and a movie. Similar attitudes were expressed with regard to the duration of the war. Most of the Ps/W from Tunisia were convinced that the war would last several years. In many of the Sicilian camps the catchword was:"The war will be over by Christmas."

1/ See OSS Special Reports, "Prisoner of War Interrogations: Opposition to the Nazis", July 30, 1943 and "Morale in Germany", R&A 1214, September 16,1943.

2/ Hereafter the abbreviation PW stands for "psychological warfare"; P/W or Ps/W (separated by stroke) for "prisoner(s) of war."

3. Attitudes toward the Home Front: Prisoners from Sicily confirm the increasing effectiveness of the Allied air war on civilian morale in bombed-out areas. There also seems to be a growing tension between Reichsdeutsche and Austrian Ps/W. Austrian prisoners were almost solidly in favor of an independent Austria after the war. Reichsdeutsche Ps/W in Sicily tended to look on Austrians almost as foreigners; this had not been observed in Tunisia. 1/ Also, strain is felt on visits home. Soldiers are no longer treated like heroes of '40 and '41. Civilians resent small privileges granted soldiers (like priority in ration queues) and refuse to show common courtesy to wounded soldiers.

II.

These results, though their value is limited by an unfortunate choice of vague categories and a summary tabulation of individual statements, tend, on the whole, to confirm the general assertion that the morale of the Nazi soldier has suffered further deterioration and that the spirit of defeatism has grown after the Tunisian and Sicilian campaigns. It may be assumed that similar changes have occurred in the state of civilian morale.

In the light of these results the question arises: Why did the Germans in Sicily show such stubborn qualities of resistance against heavy odds when their morale seems to have been so seriously affected? The answer may lie in the distinction between pre-and post-battle conditions--between behavior under normal military regimentation and symbols and behavior in a situation of defeat.

The attitudes and expressions are not directly relevant to an evaluation of the state of Nazi military and civilian morale. They express a certain Stimmung among German soldiers after defeat and in captivity. Thus they cannot be used as an indication of the state of the soldiers' morale before battle and in line of duty with this regiment or battalion. Two questions remain unanswered which are indespensable to an evaluation of the enemy's morale: (a) how did these men feel before defeat; (b) to what extent would they be able to express their defeatist Stimmung by negative action against the German military machine? These questions are not answered by the statements, either oral or written, of soldiers after defeat and in activity; these men are obviously placed in circumstances entirely different from the pre-battle situation. Thus it is not safe to assume that the morale of soldiers in a pre-battle situation is the same as the morale of soldiers in a defeat situation. The same argument holds for civilian morale, as will be shown below.

1/ Similar reports about regional friction have come from other sources; for Bavaria see PW Weekly Roundup #29, p.15.

This distinction is confirmed by another P/W report dealing with the German soldiers' attitude, before coming to Sicily, and before going into battle, concerning war prospects. Of 54 prisoners interviewed on the question of war prospects only 7 (12%) said that they knew Germany had lost the war before they came to Sicily. All seven were long-term anti-Nazis; 20 admitted that they came to this conclusion during or after the fighting in Sicily; 16 become convinced only after capture; and 11 remained unconvinced even after capture. Thus of the 43 (80%) who eventually admitted belief in German defeat, only 7 (12%) did so before the battle; those seven had been anti-Nazis long before they were put into uniform.

Several reasons may be advanced in explanation for these differences in the behavior patterns of German soldiers prior to battle and captivity.

1. Discipline: It is generally agreed that German military discipline, in spite of occasional lapses, is still unimpaired. Traditional army discipline is reinforced by the certainty of severest punishment for any infraction, and also by fear of reprisal against one's family. Of the sample 110 prisoners, a few stated that their officers and N.C.O.'s had threatened to shoot anybody disobeying orders, but none knew of this happening.

2. Soldierly Pride: The German soldier is still convinced that he is the best soldier in the world, and he would be ashamed to surrender without a fight. Even prisoners who wanted peace at any price were ashamed for what they called the cowardice of the Italians, who refused to fight even in defense of their own country. And these same prisoners, though utterly sick of war, would frequently relapse into expressions of pride in their weapons and their own achievements. "Machine gun 42 is a magnificent weapon"; "The tiger tank is the best in the world"; or, "My God, we gave the French a licking!"

3. Communal self-defense: It seems to be part of the German tactics, (if necessary) to place units into situations where the only chance of survival lies in holding out together as a unit. As has been pointed out in a previous report, the Hermann Goering Division in Sicily fought well as long as it held together as a unit, but became demoralized when split into small, individual groups. 1/

4. Fight for German survival: This is still a strong motive, reinforced as it is by fear of Russia and the subject European peoples, and by a general feeling of insecurity as to the post-war plans of the Allies.

1/ OSS Special Report, "Morale in Germany", R&A 1214, p. 3.

III.

Thus the German soldier's fighting morale remains essentially unimpaired as long as the machinery of military regimentation (discipline) and certain cherished symbolic values (prestige, honor, courage, pride) continue to operate effectively. This conclusion is also pertinent to an evaluation of civilian morale inside Germany, where similar conditions prevail.

On the one hand, the Party operates extensively with propagandistic values, such as honor, national survival, etc.; on the other hand, an effective machinery of terror and regimentation is substituted for the military discipline at the front. Thus the attitude of those Germans not yet directly affected by the war may still be predominantly positive -- similar to the pre-battle attitude of the soldiers. The soldiers reactions after defeat, however, also confirm previous reports to the effect that the stamina of civilians directly exposed to sufferings and defeat in the war is seriously affected and is gradually declining.

The war comes home to the German public by air. It may be estimated that so far about 8-10 million people (about 10% of the total population) have been directly affected by bombing attacks. Also, the air war has been localized in its impact(Hamburg, Bremen, Rostock,Hanover,Berlin, the Ruhr, Munich, Wiener-Neustadt). Thus the range of this war, carrying actual battle conditions and the spectre of defeat to the German public, is still limited as to number of people to which the statements of the soldiers in defeat may be applied directly.

The indirect effects of the air war, however, are more general. Evacuation and rumors have carried the destructive effects of raidsinto areas not directly exposed to the air war. These contacts have not only disseminated defeatist experiences and sentiments, but have themselves, because of new deprivations and irritations,become new centers of internal friction, affecting the morale of both "evacuees" and "hosts". Evidence of these indirect effects has been mounting constantly in recent months and weeks. Finally, the public at home also participates in actual war conditions through personal contact with soldiers in letters or on leave; many of these convey defeatist attitudes.

Thus it is probably safe to assume (a) that the range of defeatist attitudes inside Germany is broader that the raided localities. Even unraided areas have come to share the experiences and effects of the air war over Germany. Moreover,

(b) it is evident that this defeatism will increase with the intensification of the air war and the various deterioration of the Eastern front. It is, of course, impossible to judge accurately how far this process has spread and how far it has tended to undermine the internal discipline imposed by state and Party. There is as yet no evidence which would indicate that opposition groups have gained sufficient strength to organize any form of anti-Nazi front.

If this interpretation is correct, it would also explain the constantly recurring reports as to the general morale situation in Germany which are always characterized by this seemingly contradictory form: although the Stimmung of apathy, pessimism, and defeatism is constantly growing inside the Reich, there are as yet few signs that the State and Party discipline and control are cracking enough for any kind of revolutionary axtion. As summed up by a reliable Swedish correspondent: "Everybody does his duty with varying enthusiasm".

IV.

At the same time, this situation offers certain opportunities suggested by the reaction of soldiers for PW operations against civilians under similar conditions. On the basis of the available material, it may be said that soldiers considered those appeals most effective (because most "rational") which best expressed their own thoughts and feelings on the military situation. Thus the best technique for PW operations is to exploit those problems, fears, and anxieties for which a receptive audience may be expected because they reinforce already prevalent attitudes both military and civilian. This holds, negatively, for the exposition of German weakness and Allied strength, as well as, positively, for the implementation of our plans with regard to post-war Germany. The themes which prove useful with soldiers may also be used to advantage in addressing the civilian population of Germany.

On the negative side the following arguments are reported as successful with Ps/W:

1. Germany's military strength is exhausted. The Russians obviously cannot be beaten; Allied land and air strength has completed the encirclement of Germany. It is not necessary to dwell at great theoretical length upon the inexhaustible resources of the American war potential---the public will draw its own inferences when faced with the military facts so strongly in favor of the United Nations. Straight news now carries its own propagandistic appeal.

2. Germany's man-power and material shortages become plain because, in spite of resort of foreign workers and total mobilization, the German war machine has not been able to meet the growing military pressure.

3. This is connected with the length and extension of the German front---an argument frequently made by the Ps/W in self-justification: "Germany is a small country. Our population is only 80 million. How can we expect it to produce the manpower and war material to maintain the enormous frontier we have created for ourselves?" The soldiers appeared aware of the "vicious circle" of the Nazi military situation in which an increased effort in one field entails decreased efficiency in another.

4. Women have come to exercise an increasingly important influence on civilian morale. They are crucial to morale not only because of their increasing deprivations, but also because they serve as the best intermediaries between front-line and home-front morale. They are most directly influenced by front-line morale and conditions through letters and personal contact with soldiers on leave, and exert a similar influence upon these soldiers through the same channels. Thus women may more and more become suitable objectives for PW operations, not only through special women's programs but also through programs of a general, human interest. "German Soldiers' Graves in Tunis" and "What your sons and husbands told us" are cited as examples.

It is, however, considered imperative on the basis of P/W reactions that these negative operations be supplemented by certain positive commitments if they are to prove effective at the present state of Nazi morale.

1. Feelings of war guilt, fear of revenge, and general insecurity with regard to the future must be removed before disintegrative tendencies can be turned actively against the regime. Without definite prospects there is little incentive for political action against the internal machinery of terror and violence. Incipient antagonisms against the regime may be strengthened, however, if it can be shown that the increasingly hopeless struggle is prolonged only because the Nazi elite is trying to save itself from punishment.

2. This would also tend to strengthen the still unorganized, embryonic groups of active opposition which might become effective foci for organized activities against the regime.

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PRISONERS OF WAR IN TUNISIA AND SICILY: A STUDY IN NAZI MORALE AND PW OPERATIONS

Description

This report deals with attitudes displayed by German prisoners of war after the Tunisian and Sicilian campaigns as indices of Nazi military and civilian morale.

14 October 1943

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SUMMARY

This report, based on material released by the North African Censorship Authorities, is concerned with a comparison of the attitudes displayed by German prisoners of war after the Tunisian and Sicilian campaigns as indices of Nazi military and civilian morale.

The paper shows, first, that German military morale in Sicily had suffered considerable deterioration in comparison with the morale of German soldiers in Tunisia as illustrated by the soldiers' reactions to selected topics like war prospects, attitudes toward enemy, home, etc.

It is also shown, however, that this increase in pessimism and defeatism is not directly relevant to an evaluation of Nazi military and civilian morale for two reasons: (1) a prisoner of war interrogation reveals that morale in a defeat situation must be distinguished from the morale prevailing in a pre-battle situation; (2) only a limited sector of the civilian population has so far been exposed directly to a situation of battle and defeat by the air war over Germany.

There is considerable evidence, however, for the assumption that the air war over Germany has indirectly induced defeatism over wide areas in people not directly exposed to air raids. Although it is impossible to estimate the extent of this process and although state and Party controls seem to remain essentially intact, it is probably safe to assume that PW appeals previously successful with German soldiers after the Tunisian and Sicilian campaigns may also be applied to that part of the German civilian population not yet directly affected by the war. Special examples are included.

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I.

A comparison of the morale of German soldiers during the Tunisian campaign and the Sicilian campaign reveals significant differences of attitude for certain selected categories. These differences may be briefly summarized as follows:

1. Cooperation: A high percentage of Ps/W from Tunisia (probably the majority) resisted interrogation on military details. Only 6 out of the 110 prisoners in Sicily showed a similar reluctance, and that in most cases rather half-hearted. Similarly, most anti-Nazi and defeatist prisoners in Tunisia were afraid of possible retaliation and denunciation by the Nazis in their P/W camps. This fear was greatly reduced among those in Sicily. In one camp they gathered around the interrogation officer and shouted: "We want to go home!" "Finish the war!" "There is no use going on!"

2. War Prospects: Faith in ultimate victory (or, at least, a Western compromise peace after beating back the Russians) is said to have been characteristic of more than half the prisoners from Tunis. On the other hand, more than half the 110 Ps/W in Sicily spontaneously admitted that the war was lost. These wanted peace at any price, insisted that the German soldiers wished nothing else but to be allowed to return home to their families, their work, their glass of beer and a movie. Similar attitudes were expressed with regard to the duration of the war. Most of the Ps/W from Tunisia were convinced that the war still would last several years. In many of the Sicilian camps the catchword was: "The war will be over by Christmas."

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3. Attitudes toward the Home Front: Prisoners from Sicily confirm the increasing effectiveness of the Allied air war on civilian morale in bombed-out areas. There also seems to be a growing tension between Reichsdeutsche and Austrian Ps/W. Austrian prisoners were almost solidly in favor of an independent Austria after the war. Reichsdeutsche Ps/W in Sicily tended to look on Austrians almost as foreigners; this had not been observed in Tunisia. 1/ Also, strain is felt on visits home. Soldiers are no longer treated like heroes of '40 and '41. Civilians resent small privileges granted soldiers (like priority in ration queues) and refuse to show common courtesy to wounded soldiers.

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These results, though their value is limited by an unfortunate choice of vague categories and a summary tabulation of individual statements, tend, on the whole, to confirm the general assertion that the morale of the Nazi soldier has suffered further deterioration and that the spirit of defeatism has grown after the Tunisian and Sicilian campaigns. It may be assumed that similar changes have occurred in the state of civilian morale.

It must be pointed out, however, that these attitudes and expressions are not directly indicative of the state of Nazi military and civilian morale. They express a certain Stimmung among German soldiers after defeat and in captivity. Thus they cannot be used as an indication of the state of the soldiers' morale before battle and in line of duty with his regiment or battalion. Two questions remain unanswered which are indispensable to an evaluation of the enemy's morale: (a) how did these men feel before defeat; (b) to what extent would they be able to express their defeatist Stimmung by negative action against the German military machine? These questions are not answered by the statements, either oral or written, of soldiers after defeat and in captivity; these men are obviously placed in circumstances entirely different from the pre-battle situation. Thus it is not safe to assume that the morale of soldiers in a pre-battle situation is the same as the morale of soldiers in a defeat situation. The same argument holds for civilian morale, as will be shown below.

The same distinction explains the fighting qualities of German troops in the field. Why did the Germans in Sicily show such stubborn qualities of resistance against heavy odds when their morale seems to have been so seriously affected? The answer lies in the distinction between pre- and post-battle conditions---between behavior under normal military regimentation and symbols and behavior in a situation of defeat.

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Several reasons may be advanced in explanation for these differences in the behavior patterns of German soldiers prior to battle and captivity.

1. Discipline: It is generally agreed that German military discipline, in spite of occasional lapses, is still unimpaired. Traditional army discipline is reinforced by the certainty of severest punishment for any infraction, and also by fear of reprisal against one's family. Of the sample 110 prisoners, a few stated that their officers and N.C.O.'s had threatened to shoot anybody disobeying orders, but none knew of this happening.

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3. Communal self-defense: It seems to be part of the German tactics, (if necessary) to place units into situations where the only chance of survival lies in holding out together as a unit. As has been pointed out in a previous report, the Hermann Goering Division in Sicily fought well as long as it held together as a unit, but became demoralized when split into small, individual groups. 1/

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Thus the German soldier's fighting morale remains essentially unimpaired as long as the machinery of military regimentation (discipline) and certain cherished symbolic values (prestige, honor, courage, pride) continue to operate effectively. This conclusion is highly significant for an evaluation of civilian morale inside Germany, where similar conditions probably prevail. While civilian attachment to certain symbolic values (honor, national survival, etc.) is probably much the same as that of the soldiers at the front, Party organization and terrorism are substituted inside the Reich for military discipline. Thus it may be assumed that the attitude of those Germans not yet directly affected by the war (i.e., those like the soldiers prior to battle) is similar to the overwhelmingly positive pre-battle attitude of the soldiers. On the other hand, the soldiers' reactions confirm previous reports to the effect that the stamina of civilians directly exposed to sufferings and defeat in the war is seriously affected and is gradually declining.

The war comes home to the German public by air. It may be estimated that so far about 8-10 million people (about 10% of the total population) have been directly affected by bombing attacks. Also, the air war has been localized in its impact (Hamburg, Bremen, Rostock, Hanover, Berlin, the Ruhr district, Frankfurt, Mannheim-Ludwigshafen, Stuttgart, Nuremberg, Munich, Wiener-Neustadt). Thus the range of this war, carrying actual battle conditions and the spectre of defeat to the German public, is still limited as to number of people and regions directly affected; it is only this sector of the public to which the statements of the soldiers in defeat may be applied directly.

The indirect effects of the air war, however, are more general. Evacuation and rumors have carried the destructive effects of raids into areas not directly exposed to the air war. These contacts have not only disseminated defeatist experiences and sentiments, but have themselves, because of new deprivations and irritations, become new centers of internal friction, affecting the morale of both "evacuees" and "hosts". Evidence of these indirect effects has been mounting considerably in recent months and weeks. Finally, the public at home also participates in actual war conditions through personal contact with soldiers in letters or on leave; many of these convey defeatist attitudes.

Thus it is safe to assume (a) that the range of defeatist attitudes inside Germany is broader than the raided localities. Even unraided areas do not entirely correspond to the soldiers' pre-battle attitude, but show signs of increasing defeatism. Moreover, (b) it is evident

that this defeatism will increase with the intensification of the air war over wider areas of the civilian population. It is, of course, impossible to judge accurately how far this process has spread and how far it has tended to undermine the internal discipline imposed by state and Party. There is as yet no evidence which would indicate that opposition groups have gained sufficient strength to organize any form of anti-Nazi front.

If this interpretation is correct, it would also explain the constantly recurring reports as to the general morale situation in Germany which are always characterized by this seemingly contradictory form: although the Stimmung of apathy, pessimism, and defeatism is constantly growing inside the Reich, there are as yet few signs that the State and Party discipline and control are cracking enough for any kind of revolutionary action. As summed up by a reliable Swedish correspondent: "Everybody does his duty with varying enthusiasms."

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2. This would also tend to strengthen the still unorganized, embryonic groups of active opposition which might become effective foci for organized activities against the regime.